

John Elliott

admitted March 15th 1820

A dissertation on the medicinal properties of Oleum
Serebinthinae

Mix a short folly with thy laboured schemes,
tis a joyous folly that unbonds the mind.

The subject I have adopted as a matter of investigation, although deservedly occupying a prominent station in the Materia Medica, from its peculiar powers, in arresting some of the most distressing, and pestilencious diseases, with which human nature can be afflicted; yet so much attention has lately been directed to it, its properties so ably dissected, and accurately designated, as, to leave, apparently, nothing omitted that would further elucidate its ^{application} ~~properties~~, or render it more extensively useful. But the same objection equally applies to most subjects, that are important in their influence, or useful in practice; each of them have been analyzed with indefatigable industry; and although our efforts frequently prove futile, or abortive, notwithstanding, as we are not acquainted, with any means of as-

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certaining the limits of usefulness of any substance, only from experience, further investigations, authorize us in anticipating further discoveries, and in establishing more correct, and definite results. Although perhaps its properties are partly definitely settled, there is not a perfect unanimity of sentiment as it respects its application. However, I do not presume to have divested it of uncertainty, or to have reconciled the fluctuating and discordant state of opinion, with which it is invested; my circumscribed opportunities of practice, precluded the satisfactory conclusion, of adducing facts from my own experience, in support of every position I may advance. I have witnessed its salutary effects in many instances of Dr. McSherry's practice; and I conceive, that from the fairest analogy, its use may be extended further than has yet been particularized, and after its ultimate point of usefulness has been decided, it still remains a subject of curious & interesting speculation. Superseding its utility in the several branches of the arts and sciences, that are not immediately, or inseparably connected with medicine, its appropriation to diseases, admits of an extensive application; it holds indisputable claims to a rank amongst several of the distinct classes of the materia medica;

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and is exhibited to fulfill, respectively, the several indications of a diuretic, emmenagogue, anthelmintic, rubefacient, stimulant, as an enema, and in some cases would answer as a purgative, and displays powers, not inferior, in many respects, to most of its congeners' articles. As a rubefacient, applied to the healthy skin, it produces inflammation, and a vesicular eruption, something analogous to blistering in a slight degree. With this intention, it is much prescribed in rheumatisms, in sprains and swellings of the joints, in the affections of the throat, in pleurodynia and even in some of the deeper seated inflammations; Dr. Chapman.

In popular practice, the turpentine is taken, internally, in substance to relieve sciatica and lumbago, and I believe, frequently with success; at least the beneficial consequences, resulting from it, in cases that I ^{have} seen, were attributed to its use, no other medicine being resorted to; along with its internal exhibition, a plaster of turpentine pitch, is worn on the lumbar region. I have seen it used in cynanche tonsillaris, with very salutary results. It is recommended as a discutient in indolent tumors, paralytic affections, and chronic ulcers. Dr. Cullen asserts, that it has been found useful in intermittents, applied as an ointment to the spine.

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The facility of instituting a remedial impression on the surface, and extending it through the medium of sympathy, to the stomach, will sanction this opinion, and, as the spinal marrow is the origin of the nervous system, and therefore more susceptible of impression, and better qualified to extend it, it would also be more powerful and efficient, than when applied to a part more remote. In the same manner, ~~when applied~~ it might be useful in some of the intractable nervous affections, which depend on a concurrence of the mind, to constitute the disease; by the irritation it occasions a new impulse would be given to the mind, and the functions of the system also, would be renovated. What tends to corroborate this, is, blistering along the spine, proving effectual in curing tetanus, mentioned by Dr Chopman. Dr Caldwell, mentions its exhibition internally as well calculated, in preventing the impending paroxysm of intermittent. Mechanics are in the habit of applying it cuts, and other injuries that they are liable to, reporting favorably of its use; which perhaps is sometimes beneficial by cauterizing the vessels, and preventing the flow of blood, and thus accelerating the cure. Which is now considered nugatory or pernicious, nothing more being considered requisite, after removing

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any extraneous matter, than approximating the divided surfaces, and retaining them so, or taking up the artery if the bleeding is profuse. In Paronychia it is generally combined with cantharides, to augment the irritation of the latter, it being almost impossible to excite inflammation or raise a blister, by any means, in this distressing affection; this is agreeable to my personal experience. Notwithstanding it is thus acrib to the healthy skin, in scalds or burns it exercises an action quite the reverse, arresting the destructive tendency that the fire had left in the injured part, by instituting, from its stimulating nature, a counterpoise of action, that totally obliterates the other. I believe no other explanation has been attempted, or considered pertinent. It could not, with any plausibility, be referred to a chemical one. As an application to burns, it is usually combined with basilicon ointment, constituting what is called Kentish's ointment; which diminishes the violence of its action, and also renders it more convenient in its application; so that it may be accurately adjusted to the injured part, without implicating the sound, because, if suffered to be in contact with the healthy skin, it makes the patient uncomfortable, by the pain and inflamma-

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tion it occasions, which also retards the cure. I have seen its value attested in several instances of this kind. In one the accident occurred in taking a kettle off the fire; the foot was considerably injured, a blister arose that nearly covered it; but a cure was effected by its use, without much difficulty. Rhenish ointment was spread on cotton, which was nicely adapted to the sore, and the same dressing repeated every day, untill it was perfectly healed; gradually increasing the proportion of basilicon, that it might better harmonize with the newly forming parts. Bloodletting was had recourse to, with occasional laxatives of sulphur and cream of tartar, for the purpose of keeping the bowels regular, and also for arresting any febrile symptoms that might supervene. These singular properties along with others that it possesses are inexplicable from any of its palpable properties, and also irreconcilable with analogical reasoning. St Chaspenon has used it in the atonic shapes of dropsy; but says, "it does not display much activity." He adds, that, "as a diuretic it is a very pervading stimulant, directed specifically to the urinary organs." And that, "much more may be done with it in some of the nephritic affections, and I have undoubtedly seen it useful in the strangury from blisters, in gleet and leucorrhoea."

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I attended one case of nephritis, proceeding from gravel, in which the turpentine exerted essential benefit. However, its exhibition did not supersede, the other indications, in the mode of treatment. I bled pretty copiously, and gave purges of Glauber's salt & cream of tartar occasionally; prescribing the turpentine in the quantity of fifteen drops, in the interval, with demulcent drinks. From its salutary effects in these cases, it would not be absurd to infer, that it would be beneficial in hysteritis; the contiguity of the uterus to these parts, and the sympathies necessarily existing ^{between them}, would render it presumable, that inflammation of that organ, would be essentially relieved, by transferring the seat of irritation to the bladder; and the evacuation so immediate would, probably, assist. It has been used in calculous affections, but Dr Bullen decides against its use, inasmuch as it would be useful as an antispasmodic, and injurious if prescribed with the intention, of diminishing, or expelling stones, from the inflammation and increased irritation, it would occasion. I am informed that Dr Physic has used it with success in some instances, and considers it entitled to some confidence, and in the case I have mentioned, some calculi were discharged and health restored. His claims as an emmenagogue are not very satisfactory. On this point I have no experience, but as menstruation is a secretory

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function, it is not probable that it is inaccessible to impressions, but on the contrary, can be as readily regulated, either by general means, or by medicines that possess a specific relation, as any other function. Dr. Lehmann asserts, many of them, unquestionably, are possessed of such a property. He does not, however, repose implicit confidence in its efficacy; and I believe it holds very slender claims, if any, in the estimation of most practitioners, to this title, any effect it produces, not being the result of a specific determination, but an association with some other. All medicines occasionally demonstrating such a property, owing to the state of the system, which they are calculated to change to a more healthy, menstruation inevitably following this change. But diuretics although not properly emmenagogues, act indirectly, with great advantage, frequently executing this intention very successfully; and on these grounds the turpentine is entitled to consideration. As an anthelmintic its reputation is better established, being pretty generally admitted, that it is indisputably prompt and certain in expelling tania. I have seen it exhibited in two instances by Dr. Meacham, with success. They were soldiers; two ounces was given to one of them every morning, without experiencing any inconvenience or distress. But it appeared to be inactive, except as a purge, untill it was given three or

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four times, when a worm was discharged of considerable length, and all the symptoms subsided. The operation on the other patient was more violent, producing vertigo, pain in the head, and an uneasy sensation at stomach, with some sickness; all which were but transitory in their continuance, and the result was a removal of the disease, after a few exhibitions of the medicine. I have not had an opportunity of testing its virtues myself, in any, but a single case. And in this case the presence of worms was unquestionable, because a piece had been discharged. I directed an *Ziz* to be taken in the morning on an empty stomach, which was ~~performed~~ agreeably to my direction, but without answering any efficient purpose. Following Dr. Dumas plan, I prescribed a purge of cal: it: jal: in the evening, and the same quantity of turpentine to be repeated in the morning, a pretty severe purging was the consequence, and the worm was expelled. Its ostensible properties would induce the conclusion, that it would be very appropriate on such an occasion. So pernicious is its action, that it kills all insects that come within the sphere of its influence, notwithstanding, the human system suffers no permanent injury from its use. And in expelling worms, it is capable of exerting two powers, each entitled to our regard: if its acrimonious quality, is, alone, insufficient to expel

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them, its purgative may achieve, on the same principle, what any other purgative would. In its exhibition, the diuretic tendency is obvious, and its purgative solicited, by the largeness of the dose, that it may be more prompt and efficient with its action undivided, as two actions cannot coexist in full force, one counteracting the other. The theory of the generation of worms, has, I believe, hitherto eluded, the scrutiny of the most acute. The philosophical maxim, omnia animalia ex ovo, appears to be contradicted in this instance, as the existence of worms in fetuses, is not contradicted by it, and does not appear reconcilable with it. But as the operations of nature are, generally uniform, and consistent, such an anomaly as this, is rather exceptionable. Perhaps it is not proper to suppose that they migrate, either, perfectly formed or in the state of larva, into the uterus, having been found in it, in an unimpregnated state, where none of the rudiments can be supposed to exist, that would give impetus to the creative effort. And as an uncontrollable propensity, or instinct, urges every part of creation, to seek the element congenial to its nature; so if any contingent circumstances rendered their situation in the ~~matrum~~ ^{matrum} uncomfortable, the contiguity of the uterus would afford them a safe retreat; which is about as improbable as the story of the animalcule, journeying up ~~the~~ the vagina. Or if

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the eggs, or germs, are deposited beyond the precincts of the alimentary canal, which appears probable, as their residence otherwise, would be very precarious, and it is not repugnant either to analogy or correct philosophy to suppose so. The conjecture then that they would approach the uterus either by a voluntary effort, or by the same operation of the system, that frequently removes extraneous ^{substances} ~~substances~~ to different parts of the body. However any supposition is more consistent, than the adoption of equivocal generation, or a mechanical process of the intestines ushering them into existence. Dr Chopman who proscribes such ideas, alleges that they can only exist in, or, are more incident to a depraved and debilitated alimentary canal, but declines any further elucidation of the subject. Although the digression I have indulged in, is not altogether proper, yet it is not wholly irrelevant. But the property that distinguishes turpentine, for its superior excellence, is its stimulant; or at least its great utility in many diseases, are attributed to this. Possessing a general pervading power, that overwhens the existing actions, and instituting a new one, more consistent with the order of health, an impulse is given to every function; to reinstate itself in its ordinary train of compatible actions. In arresting the vomiting incident to yellow fever, it displays a peculiar, specific power, not referable to any or

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sensible or particular quality. Dr Chapman supposes the stomach to be approaching to a state of gangrene, which is suspended by an action, similar to what is exerted in the cure of burns. From the same kind of analogical deduction, he has extended its application to other diseases, that evince a similarity of nature, as gastritis, peritoneal inflammation, typhus fever, peripneumonia typhodes, and in most of the bowel affections, depletion being promised, if necessary in the final stages. Dr Chapman's prescription, "is a gift to be repeated, more or less frequently, according to the nature of the disease, and the best mode of giving it is alone or with a small portion of water. In yellow fever if stimulation were admissible, from a very low grade of action, the turpentine might be administered, with more propriety & advantage than other stimulants: but when violent vomiting of dark matter & its concomitant symptoms appear nothing can supersede its use. Dr Chapman avers, in the low fevers, when other diffusible stimuli are given, much may be expected from turpentine. It was a common remedy with me in the sinking condition of our winter epidemics, and I had, in some instances, much reason to be satisfied with its effects. More recently I have had occasion to use it, and with equal benefit, in the genuine typhus fever, —. The turpentine has been

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been highly extolled, by a practitioner of Dublin, whose name I do not recollect, in puerperal fever. But if I am not incorrectly informed, he resorts to it, in the early stages of the complaint, exhibiting it freely, and at the same time applying cloths soaked in it to the abdomen, so as to induce superficial inflammation? Although this practice may not be so appropriate, or appear calculated to answer the intention, yet it is not more unphilosophical, or repugnant to principles of sound induction, than blistering, in the commencement of fever, and inflammatory diseases, the latter of which has advocates, and I presume, on tolerable good foundation, considering the source from which it emanates; besides if stimulation was injurious, the action of turpentine is so peculiar as to form an exception to any general rule; but I have never seen it employed in any of these cases, and therefore can form no estimate of its value. Dr Chapman continues— Whether it is of much use in epilepsy, my own experience does not enable me to state positively. Nor may be expected from it in the spasmodic affections of the alimentary canal, such as flatulent colic, and sometimes it promptly relieves gout in the stomach. A favorite prescription of Dr Denes of this city, and with which he says he does great good, in such cases, consists of the oils of mint and turpentine. It is alluded

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to be particularly suited to periodical colicks; I have seen it used in each of these cases, in Dr Mc Cohors practice, with unequivocal success. And after the destruction of about 10% of blood, I cured myself of dysentery with three exhibitions of the medicine in the quantity of ʒi each time. Dr Burns recommends it in after pains proceeding from flatulence & costiveness, acting both as a laxative & antispasmodic; also in hystericalgia, and spasms and cramps of the stomach. Dr Bullen recommends its use in chronic rheumatism. It is the first resource in popular practice in nearly every variety of this affection; and its reputed qualities of promoting the secretions & excretion, with a very pervading influence would induce the belief that confidence was not wholly misplaced. The same person mentions, its having been found useful in scurvy, and that it possesses the two leading properties that constitute an antiscorbutic, viz diaphoretic and diuretic. I have heard of its being used in scarlatina maligna, with very conspicuous advantage. The richness and paleness that introduce the disease, before any affection of the throat, that could be supposed capable of communicating a sympathetic affection, is apparent, would justify the inference, that the original disease was located in the stomach, and that the throat affection was but secondary or symptomatic of the general disease.

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The accurate & unerring intelligence known to exist between the extremities, or different portions, of canals, would suggest such an opinion without any concurrent circumstances. But the deformed condition of the face, and the united testimony of the ablest physicians, in ascribing the series of symptoms that appear, to an inflamed state of the alimentary canal, continuous with that which appears in the throat, whether propagated by it or existing previously, is not determined; but which dissection has disclosed, and traced through its whole extent, incontrovertibly demonstrates it to exist. To combat this, nothing could be better adapted than the turpentine, at a suitable crisis of the disease. It comprehends the properties most proper in conducting the treatment, the purgative, stimulant, and diuretic. As a stimulant, it would be peculiarly energetic, in sustaining declining nature, and changing the aspect of the disease. As a diuretic, it would be advantageous, to obviate that tendency of the system, which favours dropsical effusions at the termination of the disease. Hence - were it was attended with high action, it should not supersede the use of appropriate remedies, as bleeding, saline purgatives or mercurial ones, vomits, & occasional aspersion of cold water. What is its precise *modus operandi* in these instances, is a mystery, that no di-

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gence of observation has yet developed. As no other stimulant will accomplish the same indication, with such promptitude and facility, it most indubitably, must exert an action distinct from any property of that class. It cannot act mechanically or chemically in eluting any medicinal result, agreeably to Dr. Cuvier, though it may previous to any operation of the system, suffer a change of properties, that will materially affect the result. That its salutary influence is wholly abstract from any of its obvious or known qualities is probably true: but, that it insinuates an antagonizing impression, specifically determined to some part, which is communicated, to the rest of the system, is more agreeable to our knowledge of the animal economy, and, accords better with its caterotted series of actions. Perhaps, its ~~comparalled~~ utility, in subduing morbid action, attached to certain forms of disease, may be attributed to its action on the urinary organs, determined to these parts with such specific energy, whether arising from a more direct communication between the stomach ~~and~~ bladder is immaterial; however, many facts seem to favour this opinion, and experiments appear, unexceptionable, to have demonstrated it, as existing. Certainly, whether it is so or not, remedial impressions are effected in this way with as much success and efficiency as any other. By concentrating excitement in the bladder or the contiguous parts, a revulsion is obtained, some

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tine may be administered, very advantageously, in many of the bowel
affections. Dr Cullen says he has found it to be one of the most certain
laxatives that could be employed, in colics, and other cases of obstinate
constipation. I presume it might be used, very successfully, as an obel-
intine, in this way. The formula of Dr Chapman, is made in the fol-
lowing manner, by blending very intimately one or two table
spoonful of the oil of turpentine with the yolk or white of eggs,
and afterwards add a full pint of water, or which is preferable, the
thin mucilage of gum arabic, or flax seed. This is a very valuable
prescription, under all circumstances of obstructed bowels, and parti-
cularly of flatulent colic. I now conclude my thesis, and although
perhaps not directed with a perfect accuracy of discrimination

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